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Goth Beauty, Style, and Sexuality: Neo-Traditional Femininity in Twenty-First Century Subcultural Magazines

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**‘Goth Beauty, Style and Sexuality: Neo-Traditional Femininity in Twenty-First
Century Subcultural Magazines’**

In *The Beauty Myth* (1991), Naomi Wolf evaluates how far femininity is constructed and indeed regulated by concepts of beauty. The fashion industry, consumer culture, magazines and the media all present ways in which women are expected to style themselves.ⁱ The beauty myth is sold and packaged to women as emancipatory, as offering choice to modern, savvy and assertive women. The following argument maintains that the logic of subcultural style draws a great deal from ‘mainstream’ strategies of advertising and commodity cultures. In the goth scene specifically, there exists a ‘complex infrastructure of events, consumer goods and communications, all of which were thoroughly implicated in media and commerce.’ⁱⁱ At the same time, many accounts of gender dynamics in goth subculture suggest it is an egalitarian space, offering equality in terms of gendered representation and sexual emancipation. For instance, participants frequently articulate that the subculture is a tolerant space, a utopia of gender-bending and sexual liberation: ‘A recurrent theme in the stories female goths tell about their style is power and control.’ⁱⁱⁱ There are several strands of gendered representation clearly visible in the ephemera of goth culture, each of which is often hailed as challenging to ‘mainstream values’: the ostensible celebration of alternative sexualities almost always incarnated as bisexuality, or a flirtation with fetish, S&M style and erotic modes of dress such as the *femme fatale*; a hyperfemininity which seeks to parody femininity (but which is deeply conservative and heavily invested in Victorian sartorial choices); and a notion of androgyny which claims to challenge normative gender binaries.

Indeed, with regard to the ephemera of goth – flyers, magazines, advertisements, as well as consideration of how promoters, bands and subcultural style gurus represent gender – we can see that goth has much more in common with conventional gender values for women than it might first appear. Any challenge to heteronormative gender roles is partial at best. Catherine Spooner has cautioned against easy appropriation of transgressive values onto goth.^{iv} One woman in Amy Wilkins' research explained 'as long as you dress sexy [you'll fit in].'^v It is possible to appraise such comments in the light of the post-feminist climate of the early twenty-first century, where practices focusing on style and appearance are frequently lauded as sexually empowering: 'the body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power *and* as always already unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness.'^{vi} More broadly, John Fiske's discussion in 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom' emphasizes the importance of gender, race, age and sexuality in discussion of subcultures, noting that the notion of 'capital,' as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), and developed by subculture critics such as Sara Thornton (1995), is often neglected in major analyses, in favour of economic and class critique.^{vii} In using critiques of post-feminism and its complicity with commodity culture, I seek to reevaluate how gender and sexuality functions in these publications, and provide an alternative way of thinking about goth.

The current analysis seeks to tread a careful line between considering the relatively small-scale, partly autonomous, and specialist nature of goth commodity, and at the same time acknowledging that the logic of such retail and marketing practices are often drawn from dominant discourses found in more 'popular' methods of

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consumption.^{viii} This clearly relates to the classic narrative of subculture. In Hebdige’s account, subcultures are sites of working-class resistance, but when they are co-opted by the mainstream, they are diffused in terms of their radical impetus.^{ix} However, as Hodgkinson has noted, the idea of ‘subcultural retail’, where consumerism is implicated in a subculture from its very origins, is crucial: ‘[whilst there is] a significant degree of self-generation for the goth scene, such internal consumption, far from being anti-commercial, was also enabled by the diverse free-market economy within which subculture operated.’^x At Whitby Goth Weekend (WGW), a bi-annual festival which began in 1994 in Whitby, UK, goths and other sympathetic subcultural members such as metallers, steampunks, and bikers assemble for live music, socialising in the pub, and shopping.^{xi} The spectacle of buying and selling at WGW’s ‘Bizarre Bazaar’ showcases independent retailers, branded goods, music exchanges, magazines, and flyers testifying to the inherently commodity-driven, although specialist, logic of the subculture. If this is the case, then how far do the advertising strategies, the commodities and ephemera of goth subculture replicate traditional gender norms of ‘mainstream’ commodity culture, and how far is resistance to mainstream cultural and economic values even possible? How far are representations of women implicated in discourses of heterosexual/male fantasy or postfeminist beauty regimes and body management? Slippages between subculture and mainstream are frequent and often neo-traditional in their message regarding women’s appearance. By close inspection of the goth scene through ethnographic research (interviews, observation), as well as scrutiny of cultural products (readings of magazines and self-representations through media) and popular cultural understandings of ‘goth’ in the twenty-first century, I argue women’s goth fashion and body image often (but not exclusively) represents a traditional type of femininity.

Paradoxically, despite participants' allegiances to challenging mainstream fashion and beauty culture, such images frequently draw from conventional ideas of womanhood.

BEAUTY AND STYLE

Goth represents a subcultural affiliation to a 'dark' aesthetic. Emerging from punk in the 1970s, goth was initially a UK phenomenon, although it has since found followers across the world. It is worthwhile to distinguish between different types of goth style: traditional or 'trad. goth' being the most recognisable, including dyed black hair, heavy emphasis on make up for men and women, long clothes in fabrics such as velvet, satin and PVC, as well as an overlap with BDSM fashion sensibilities. The scene centres in the UK on nightclubs in London such as the now defunct Batcave, but also in urban locations such as Leeds, Bradford and Manchester. There are other sub-genres, such as cybergoth, in which the literary genre of cyberpunk is influential, (popularised by authors like William Gibson and Philip K. Dick). Bands include VNV Nation, Apoptygma Berzerk, and Covenant, and are more industrial and dance based in terms of sound. The more recent evolution of steampunk, which is a celebration and critique of nineteenth-century science and aesthetics, combined with sci-fi alternative universes, could also be said to have origins in the goth scene.

As a musical subculture, goth is characterised most famously by the popularity of the Sisters of Mercy in the 1980s (although the lead singer, Andrew Eldritch, rejects any association with Goth), as well as The Damned, Bauhaus, Specimen, Christian Death, The Bolshoi, The Cure, Siouxsie and the Banshees, and The March Violets. The music is diverse, but is often characterised by a heavy drum beat (on a drum machine), rock guitars, low register male vocals, and as a counterpoint, a high register

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female voice. Despite being primarily a scene which celebrates, and is born of, musical taste and indeed literary discernment (many participants also share an intellectual love of the nineteenth century, poetry, and the arcane), goth subculture is fundamentally ‘spectacular’: sartorial choices, tattoos, piercings, hair colour, and more generally a ‘dark aesthetic’ is a marker of goth membership for the wider society and for other subcultural members. Thus the way in which participants style themselves visually and in gendered terms is crucial in any analysis. Advertising in alternative magazines and media, self-representation and notions of beauty, all combine to present a very specific notion of femininity for goth women, which is occasionally challenging, but more often far from radically disruptive to patriarchal or indeed misogynistic notions circulating in the broader culture of the West.

In *What a Girl Wants*, Diane Negra (2009) has addressed the ways in which postfeminist ideas of beauty and taste are actually retreatist in terms of their emphasis on ‘romance, de-aging, a makeover’ and she maintains the market economy is maintained to promote such ideas to women.^{xii} The notions of self-care and ‘me-time’ (personal grooming, exercise and self-management) are frequently proffered as emancipatory: ‘one of the distinctive features of the postfeminist era has been the spectacular emergence of the underfed, overexercised female body.’^{xiii} The promotion of such aesthetics in advertising and commodity culture, both mainstream and subcultural, suggest that women are active agents in the construction of the self, whereas in fact, they frequently tap into a backwards-looking, and often patriarchal vision of visual femininity. Comparatively, goths often seek to distance themselves from normative ideas of beauty: ‘[they] would insist that their own beauty ideals, unlike those of the *Baywatch* babe or the Calvin Klein waif, are self-inventions, not

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3 capitulations to mainstream norms or what is presumed to be beautiful.^{xiv} Despite
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5 this claim, even a cursory look at the notion of goth femininity in magazines registers
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7 how complicit it is with mainstream values: how to achieve perfect hair, nails, make-
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9 up, figure, whilst women are exhorted to make plans for gothic weddings, buy gothic
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11 engagement jewellery and enjoy all the trappings of mainstream postfeminist culture,
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13 merely with a darker tint.
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19 In contradistinction to the idea that goth commodity is completely self-generated and
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21 almost exclusively DIY, a wider survey of the scene demonstrates what Hodgkinson
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23 identifies as a ‘pick ‘n’ mix’ approach: clothing and products drawn from subcultural
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25 retail, from making clothes and jewellery, and the high street itself.^{xv} This is also
26
27 apparent in one of the major cosmetic brands associated with goth culture:
28
29 Illamasqua. The company celebrates an extreme and theatrically ‘dark’ style, clearly
30
31 aimed at the goth consumer. Illamasqua has provided sponsorship for the all-girl goth
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33 football team, ‘The Sisters of Real’, which plays for charity at WGW, as well as
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35 support for the S.O.P.H.I.E. Foundation, which campaigns against hate crimes
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37 directed at subcultures.^{xvi} One of the founders of the brand, Julian Kynaston,
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39 explained how Illamasqua’s concept originated: ‘We used this period [1920s Berlin]
40
41 as inspiration when we were at concept stage because the club scene... was so Avant
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43 Garde. Dressing up was key and everyone went all out, expressing their alter ego
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45 through makeup and dressing up. There were no boundaries or rules.’^{xvii} Clearly the
46
47 fluidity of the concept behind the brand, the lack of ‘boundaries and rules’, alongside
48
49 the German Weimar aesthetic often borrowed by goth participants, is one of the main
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51 reasons why Illamasqua is so attractive to the subculture. This was very much in
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53 evidence when Kynaston was asked about age, beauty and femininity:
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There is a prejudice towards age in our industry that we wanted to break down. Mature women are only ever traditionally seen in anti-ageing campaigns so our Generation Q campaign main shot was a stunning woman of 73 years young...^{xviii}

This celebration of normative models seems to be a positive move from within the beauty industry. Indeed, the Generation Q campaign showcases a range of women, including older women, Black and Asian women, as well as men. In terms of Goth culture itself, however, the clear visibility of older women in bars and nightclubs is not reflected in subcultural publications, or in academic analysis, as the theoretical correlation between goth and ‘youth culture’ makes clear. One useful corrective to this lacuna is Hodkinson’s article on goth and ageing (2011), in which he explains ‘older goths have remained involved in sufficient numbers that the scene itself is increasingly dominated by the over-thirties.’^{xix} Despite Illamasqua’s Generation Q campaign, goth women in the 30+ age bracket are often subjected to ideas of ‘age-appropriateness’ in terms of rejecting more ‘youthful’ attire in favour of so-called dignity and maturity.^{xx} Samantha Holland has noted that older alternative women were positive about body shape, but also said they would prefer to be too slim than overweight and adapted their clothing to cover up more.^{xxi} In my survey of alternative magazines (spanning the first decade of the twenty-first century), no magazine offered marketing images of older women, despite the ageing demographic of goth culture. Clearly the message is that women need to maintain a strident beauty regime to keep ageing at bay for as long as possible.

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3 So what beauty and style regime does goth culture recommend? In common with
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5 most women's magazines, lifestyle features in *Gothic Beauty* have an advisory voice
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7 which is often seen to emulate the role of a benevolent female, sometimes a mother
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9 figure, but here, a friendship role: 'Various critics have characterised the friendly
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11 voice of women's magazines as the voice of a sister, or female confidante.'^{xxii} By
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13 implication if not *de facto*, the reader is presumed to be younger and inexperienced,
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15 seeking advice from the fashion column. In Issue 37 of *Gothic Beauty*, girls and
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17 women are exhorted to 'pay attention to climate' when choosing attire: stockings are
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19 advocated to keep you 'warm and toasty' whilst if you are a 'bit shy' about hats, you
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21 are quietly instructed to wear a fascinator.^{xxiii} The imperative tone of the headline
22
23 banner 'Gothic Accessories: Don't Leave Home Without Them!' further constructs
24
25 an idea that alternative women need to be nurtured and shown how to represent
26
27 themselves publicly, whilst also simultaneously offering an ironic and lighthearted
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29 tone. Far from being a self-construction or mode of individual expression, gothic
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31 femininity here is about conforming to a specific type of womanhood. Of particular
32
33 relevance is a lifestyle feature entitled 'Gothic Off Days.' Whilst this article features
34
35 one of the few occasions where an older readership is acknowledged (references to
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37 stressful jobs and children feature here), it also articulates the classic postfeminist
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39 narrative of trying to have it all:
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47 You've surely had mornings that for whatever reason you just don't have the
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49 time or creative energy to assemble a beautiful, elaborate ensemble. There are
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51 just days – or weeks – when you're tired, your brain's not running at full
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53 capacity, or you're just not feeling it. Maybe you're busier than usual, you've
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55 got a lot of stress at work, you're [sic] kids aren't even close to being ready for
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3 school. You love being goth: you work, lovingly, on your appearance most
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5 days, but today you just... can't.^{xxiv}
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10 The article reminds women that they are entitled to a day off. However, what follows
11 is not a challenge to a carefully constructed appearance and beauty regimen, but
12 rather, ways in which to make this manageable. Adopting a 'go-to outfit' means you
13 can get ready quickly, or you can pre-plan clothes during the night before. Similarly
14 goth women can 'go make-up free' but 'it might be uncomfortable to go a day
15 without'. Deploying just a lipstick or eyeliner is advocated, whilst organizing your
16 dark wardrobe by fabric (rather than colour) is also an option: 'the upkeep needed for
17 an organized closet can seem counterproductive... [but] it only takes a few additional
18 minutes to put clothes in their proper place after doing laundry.'^{xxv} Whilst seeking to
19 challenge the need for such effort in terms of appearance, the article also reinforces it.
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21 In the same issue, women are advised about hair dye: again, the bond of sorority is
22 invoked 'I'm here to help you', whilst visibility is seen to be the most desirable aspect
23 of style: 'You can have dazzling, gorgeous hair that will receive loads of compliments
24 wherever you go.'^{xxvi} Your nails need attention, and the 'Product Reviews' section of
25 each issue offers further advice about what to purchase.^{xxvii} Far from being critical of
26 normative femininity, these magazines actively bolster the beauty industry: features
27 and advertisements, including those by Illamasqua, as well as advertorial style articles
28 are abundant in such magazines. It may involve a more 'outrageous' cosmetic colour
29 palette, but the effect in constructing goth femininity is essentially the same as in any
30 other women's magazine. As Talbot notes, 'the need to do beauty work... is presented
31 as shared wisdom' and ultimately constructs a kind of 'consumer femininity': 'a
32 feminine identity that women achieve for themselves when they buy and use
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commodities.^{xxviii} The effect of this consumer femininity is to naturalise a particular vision of what a woman is: it survives on high maintenance and women's anxieties about their appearance and their bodies.^{xxix} Packaged as a form of empowerment and choice, the subculture only really achieves a highly normative emphasis on female attractiveness and desirability.^{xxx} Indeed, while most goths suggest the scene embraces all types of body shape, in reality, there is a celebration of the tiny waist and large breasts (accentuated by corsetry), or the slenderness of a waif-like, girlish figure. The overweight and the obese are seen to 'fall short of the gothic body ideal.'^{xxxi} In these terms, Wolf's Beauty Myth, circulated through women's magazines and through commodity, haunts the goth woman as much as it does 'mainstream' culture, so much so, that the cultural products of the subculture share the same values, strategies and interests of the market at large.^{xxxii}

ANDROGYNY AND HYPERFEMININITY

Goth culture's celebration of androgyny is a recurrent observation both by participants and in critical appraisals of the scene. We might initially consider Ross Haenfler's exploration of this playful subversion of visual gender coding: 'Many goths engage in gender bending, or playing with what it means to be a man or a woman, challenging conventional gender expectations.'^{xxxiii} One aspect is the make-up practices for men: goth males often, but not exclusively, sport long hair, eyeliner, nail varnish, heavy foundation (or 'corpse paint') and lipstick, although the latter is more a style of the 'trad. goth' male. One fanzine (amusingly entitled *The Worst Fanzine*), describes male fashion in detail and offers make-up tips to boys: men are advised to avoid make-up like 'Ru Paul', and to avoid imitating women's make-up 'unless you want to look feminine' as well as the need for shaving and moisturising

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3 before the application of make-up.^{xxxiv} However, *Devolution* magazine, which broadly
4 celebrates punk, goth and metal for a mixed-sex audience, provides a solid example as
5 to how androgyny is policed in subculture. The magazine includes a regular feature,
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10 ‘Devo Girl’, which usually has a fairly scantily clad, subcultural woman pictured for
11 promotional purposes. These women are slim, sexy and conventionally attractive,
12 despite hair colour and style which serve as markers for the ‘alternative.’ Nancy
13 Harry (Issue 27) explains that ‘Being a Devo girl has helped me a lot with my
14 modelling’ and offers details as to her favourite alcohol, in case someone wants to
15 buy her a drink at the bar (a classic sign of feminine dependence).^{xxxv} Broadly
16 describing herself as ‘punk’, Nancy poses in a leopard bra with a chain saw and a
17 snarl, heavily tattooed, with pink and black hair. In many ways, despite the
18 comparatively aggressive and confrontational version of femininity presented, the
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‘Devo Girl’ spread clearly derives a lot of its impetus from the classic pin-up. This is
far from simple as pin-ups can offer a picture of traditional and transgressive
womanhood. Buszek has observed: ‘Whilst many pin-ups are indeed silly caricatures
of women that mean to construct their humiliation and passivity as turn-ons, the genre
has also presented the sexualised woman as self-aware, assertive, strong, and
independent.’^{xxxvi} She is untouchable, yet commodified, representing taboo
behaviours such as BDSM, masturbatory practices and an ungoverned sexuality
(owned by anyone who buys the magazine, but also evading exclusive possession by
any one man). Certainly Nancy, billed as a ‘playful anarchist’ might offer an
alternative to a conventional unthreatening woman, but nonetheless it is a highly
sexualised femininity which seems to accord with the dangerous female or femme
fatale, particularly in her statement: ‘I think we should all go to hell and party alllll
the time.’^{xxxvii}

The 'Devo' models are almost exclusively women, but there is the occasional male model. In fact, the androgynous appearance of the 'Devo Boy' reveals a far from conventional approach to subcultural masculinity.^{xxxviii} When asked about his typical day, he claims that 'I usually wake up and sort my life out in the sense of hair and make-up (I'm such a girl).' Whilst Seef's cross-gendered style is overt, we might challenge the notion that it is a) unusual and b) marking gender egalitarianism. For instance, one WGW attendee, when asked if goth men or women were more vain, replied that 'we're all women... All goths are girls, whether they are born male or not.'^{xxxix} One of the major problems with the notion underlying androgyny in goth is the essentialist notions nonetheless attributed to women: women are vain, women's main priorities are hair and make-up. This is also evident in Seef's casual remark that he is 'such a girl' because his priorities are based in his appearance. Basically, such claims merely reiterate the conventional idea of femininity that women are (and indeed should be) focussed on their appearance rather than anything more substantial, and this is seen to replicate the foundational logic of the beauty industry itself. Only one model, 'Collette Vontora' (figure 1) revealed anything like a 'female masculinity' and almost exclusively, goth clubs and events reveal various forms of very conventional femininity.^{xl} The options for goth women are thus significantly narrower than the culture itself acknowledges.

If the femme fatale is one incarnation for alternative women's fashion, hyperfemininity is another. When pressed on what gothic beauty actually means, Julian Kynaston of Illamasqua articulated: 'To me, it is the most beautiful and feminine look for a woman, high fringe, porcelain skin, dark hair, intriguing make up,

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but the goth “spectrum” can be cast so wide and that is part of the beauty, it can be interpreted in so many different ways and into many different looks.^{xli} Whilst clearly acknowledging goth subculture embraces many different looks, the notion of the ‘feminine’ (passive, wide-eyed, long hair, long clothes, and/or corsetry), is one which features throughout goth marketing and magazine culture.

Even a cursory glance at goth fashion magazines reveals a fascination with a very conventional approach to the female form. Many images feature a hyperfeminine female model whose gaze does not meet the camera (as per the convention of feminine behaviour – for a woman to meet a gaze is to suggest sexual availability and indeed promiscuity), in soft focus, or in a reclining pose (see figures 2 and 3). ‘Trad. goth’ women in Victorian apparel, including the ubiquitous corset, feature alongside those who derive their style from the incursion of the fetish scene into goth subculture (see figures 4 and 5). In each instance, the models are conventional figures of femininity: long, trailing skirts, veils, parasols, or images of the sexualised female spectacle we have come to associate with ‘mainstream’ marketing (the exposure of stockings, lingerie, short skirts often on a small-waisted body with large cleavage). Indeed, in a very telling advertisement for shoes and handbags (figure 6) models are attired in boots, but little else apart from PVC lingerie and fishnets. Such attire is arguably representative of goth clubwear, but the influences behind the usage of sexualised images in advertising is more complex. When asked about the images of women circulating on the scene, a time-honoured promoter and member of the Leeds goth scene stated:

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3 'I don't think there is anything... different about the goth scene compared to
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5 other similar subcultures, aside from the slightly suspicious propensity of its
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7 members to believe that there is... I guess [it] is inevitably going to be similar
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9 to the mainstream on the grounds that – certainly in promotional terms – the
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11 mainstream does what it does because it works.'^{xlii}
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16 So goth clearly borrows normative or 'feminine' images of women to sell its various
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18 wares, including clubnights, clothing, jewellery, magazines, music. Despite this, we
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20 must be careful about generalisations. In her discussion of the corset (a staple of goth
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22 women's wardrobes and featured extensively in advertising copy), Valerie Steele has
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24 observed that, like most other items of clothing, the corset is an 'unstable signifier',
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26 which has represented both patriarchal restriction and liberation from such cultural
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28 constraints.^{xliii} Whilst acknowledging this, we can nonetheless discern many instances
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30 of hyperfemininity and heteronormativity (explored more fully in the next section),
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32 especially through the spectacle of the goth wedding. The goth magazines under
33
34 scrutiny here carry advertisements, letters and features delivering advice on that
35
36 'perfect day'. In common with the 'mainstream', the goth wedding clearly signifies
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38 consumerism: bridal media and the wedding industry all convey services to ensure the
39
40 contemporary woman has the wedding of her dreams.^{xliv} *Devolution* (Issue 21) carries
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42 features on bouquets, cakes, table decorations, vodka ice sculptures and parasols,
43
44 whilst adverts for custom bridal jewellery, 'Atelier Gothique' (figure 7) pictures a
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46 very conventionally feminine woman alongside a male androgynous figure.^{xlv} His
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48 gesture of possession (arm guardedly around her) and her acquiescence (her hand on
49
50 his) denote how predictably conservative goth marketing can be. These problems
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52 coalesce in another image for 'Atelier Gothique' (figure 8), this time with a seemingly
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emaciated and pallid woman in a coffin. The staples of goth style pictured here (pallor, slenderness, deathliness) also present a passive feminine form. It may present a challenge to ‘mainstream’ versions of beauty as tanned and blonde, but it also represents a pathologisation of the female body: the Victorian ideal of femininity as weak, unwell and disempowered.^{xlvi} Indeed, Claire Amaranth’s article/advertorial on goth weddings, ‘Till Death Us Do Part’ cites how far goth weddings end up being ‘traditional’ – ‘some Goths tend to stick to more traditional attire while still weaving in a few sprinklings of their personality.’^{xlvi} Amaranth herself advises that a look through eBay with search terms such as ‘ball gown’ are advantageous. Combined with the images of wedding dresses pictured, the goth wedding quite obviously trades on the bride as ‘princess’ trope.^{xlvi}

The bridal industry, and indeed the institutionalised nature of marriage in contemporary culture, panders to our most stereotypical notions of male-female relations: ideals of femininity, romance, and tradition. Additionally, despite claims of sexual diversity in goth, there were no examples of marketing directed to same-sex couples, who might legitimately desire a blessing of their union. Every advertisement and discussion of the goth wedding was heteronormative and highly conventional. This becomes more pertinent when we think about the relationship between goth and sexual diversity.

(BI)SEXUALITY

In her analysis of postfeminism, Sarah Gamble maintains that the term points towards an agenda that is ‘implicitly heterosexist in orientation.’^{xlix} This might initially appear quite alien to the various accounts of post-millennial goth culture which see it as a

celebration of alternative sexualities: ‘goth has been and continues to be a space of coming out for young sexual minorities – dykes, fags, trannies, bisexuals, fetishists, cyberindustrial punks, queer hets.’^l Despite this utopian plethora of sexual identities and perversities (underrepresented in magazines), women on the scene often identify as bisexual because it has a certain cult status within the scene: Brill notes alternative sexualities represent an ‘outsider status’ which has a certain cachet and is highly prized as a form of subcultural capital.^{li} Many goth women articulate a bisexual or bicurious identity, but in contradistinction to the narrative of androgyny which includes men but rarely women, this articulation is the preserve of the female:

[T]here are far more female goths who claim a bisexual identity than male goths: two girls “snogging” are a standard sight in goth clubs, yet one rarely sees goth men do the same. Moreover, goth couples who express a desire for bisexual experiences... nearly always fit the standard threesome pattern of a decidedly ‘straight’ male and ‘bisexual’ female looking for another bisexual female to play with.^{lii}

On the surface, the ways in which non-normative sexual relationships are represented in goth culture might seem to counteract any claim of regressive sexual politics. Goth is celebrated as being queer-friendly and is perceived as offering a rejection of straightforward, heterosexual, monogamous relationships. It is not the place of any cultural critique to distinguish between ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ sexual choices and performances, as one interviewee contended: ‘It’s a difficult charge to levy against someone, that they’re “playing” bi. For some people, the attraction may go as far as kissing and touching someone of the same gender, but no further.’^{liii} However,

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3 it is possible to suggest that the theory of goth sexuality (inclusive, queer, perverse)
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5 isn't always mapped onto practice. The polyamorous relationship celebrated on the
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7 scene, including the sexual openness of the threesome, almost always functions with
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9 two women and one man. Whilst my interviewee noted 'I don't know to what extent
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11 threesomes lack a strong female sexuality - in a threesome with two bi women, I can
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13 imagine one of them taking charge,'^{liv} it should be noted that the threesome is also a
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15 mainstay of pornographic representation as a straight, male fantasy:
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21 *Girls Gone Wild* videos and pornography that depicts apparently straight
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23 young women making out and/or having sex with other women, work to create
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25 and perpetuate stereotypical misconceptions about bisexual women. This is
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27 especially frustrating because the overwhelming majority of such visuals are
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29 produced and orchestrated by straight men, for straight men... these are
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31 straight men's fantasies... straight men's ideas of how women do or should
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33 have sex with other women: it must be for their (straight male) pleasure.^{lv}
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39 The conservatism of such practice is obvious, and it operates to occlude both the
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41 radicalism of lesbianism (ie. the active, penetrative, heterosexual male is absent and
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43 undesirable) and the destabilising threat of penetrative male-to-male intimacy. My
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45 interviewee continued that this is one of the reasons why she identifies as lesbian:
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47 'Urgh - I like the idea of being, and identifying as, lesbian, partly for those reasons.
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49 I'm annoyed by women who snog each other to turn men on, I think it does devalue
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51 something which is valuable, and which does not involve men.'^{lvi}
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Indeed, as one of Wilkins's interviewees complains about polygamy on the scene: 'There seems to be a double standard – girls in heterosexual relationships can date other women, but not other men.'^{lvii} Conversely, the male partner is often free to date *other women*. The effect of this is twofold: it denigrates and undervalues the relationships between women (as relationship with a woman is perceived as somehow less threatening than with another male); the straight man retains his freedoms, the bisexual woman must curtail half her choices implicitly *to please her male partner*. Indeed, my interviewee, K.L. Baudelaire commented: I'm annoyed by women who snog each other to turn men on'. She also identified some of the problems with queer sexualities in goth:

I'd estimate that a woman of any persuasion is, generally, more likely to repress her own desires to please her partner, than is a man...When women start to feel that their needs are more important than keeping hold of their current partner at all costs, I'd expect to see more dominant female sexualities becoming evident.^{lviii}

It is apparent that the covert narrative fostered by goth culture is often normative and heterosexual, despite the protests articulated by some women, such as the interviewee above.^{lix} Exclusively female sexual relationships are not provided with 'structural support' in the community; as Wilkins notes, 'more often than not, bisexual goth women are involved with straight men'. Long-term relationships between women are relatively rare, and 'goth women's relationships with other women are frequently subsidiary to heterosexual relationships.'^{lx} As such, groups like 'The Queer Alternative' are seeking to foster a different approach to goth, gender and sexuality.

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Their mission statement explains they support the ‘acceptance, visibility and equality for people of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other minority sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBT+) within alternative subcultures.’^{lxi} Indeed, clear evidence of this situation arises from within the community itself: K.L. Baudelaire maintains ‘I’m more likely to find men than women who are attracted to me.’^{lxii} That such a group even exists is a clear testimony to the urgency of rethinking representations of gender and sexuality in goth.

So what is the logic behind same-sex desire in goth culture and how is it represented? In common with the logic of some polyamorous (MFF) relationships on the scene, advertising and music culture seem to find female/female sexual performance unthreatening to patriarchal institutions, and as we have seen, a bulwark to male heterosexuality. In the logic of advertising, ‘the notion of women portrayed sexually with other women is not as threatening to a male-centred culture in which male homosexuality is often viewed as an affront to male privilege.’^{lxiii} Indeed, in advertising featured by lesbian publications, women’s companionship is emphasised, contact is limited to an embrace, and models are usually fully dressed.^{lxiv} In many instances of conventional and subcultural magazines, despite an appeal to a female or mixed audience audience, the scopic drive of advertising is emphatically male. As John Berger popularly said, ‘Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.’^{lxv} Thus in subcultural performances, including advertising, women frequently imagine how they will look to men. Clearly this differs in the exclusively female gaze: in lesbian magazines, advertisements often emphasise companionship and solidarity.^{lxvi} By contrast, the goth subculture often aligns itself with a bisexual ‘raunch culture.’^{lxvii} In relation to goth specifically, we might note how ‘A lot of

women think it's a good way to pull men by looking bisexual, seeming a lot more kinky and adventurous than just being, you know, straight.^{lxviii} Overt sexual displays are often designed to titillate a heterosexual male gaze. Two advertising examples will suffice here. One, for the US clothing company Inkubus (figure 9), has two women in an outdoor scene: one woman, sporting pigtails, holds the hair of another in a pseudo-sexual gesture of domination. This link with BDSM is further emphasised as the pigtailed woman sits on what appears to be a stone 'throne'. The tagline on the advert reads 'Indulge your dark desires'. The gaze of the pigtailed woman, directed to camera, invites participation rather than identification. Now whilst the company is clearly advertising *women's* clothing (in a broadly woman-orientated magazine), and shows an intimate scene between two women, the logic of the advert operates on the level of heterosexual male desire. We might note, along with Naomi Wolf, that the content of adverts in ordinary women's magazines, when compared with pornography, reveal very little difference except in the degree of explicitness, and thus women's desires, their self-image, become implicated with male fantasies.^{lxix} Likewise an advert for clothing and accessories in *Gothic Beauty*, Issue 34 (figure 10) features two erotically attired, vaguely cybergoth women flanking a third, partly encased in an iron cage. Again, the direct gaze to camera invites participation, whilst the cage suggests domination/submission roleplay, but the overall sexual connotations of the scene suggests influence of male fantasy rather than female camaraderie and intimacy. There is an additional participant-viewer implied in each of these adverts: firmly heterosexual and male. Finally, similar images circulate in promotional material for goth-identified music. Lesbian Bed Death's album cover, *Designed by the Devil, Powered by the Dead* (2010), exemplifies this trend (figure 11). Whilst the band has male and female musicians, two women feature on the cover, explicitly

referencing the Madonna/Whore dichotomy: one virtuous looking girlish figure is seated, surrounded by candles, clasping a small pile of books. Over her shoulder, a vampish dominatrix loiters whilst carrying a riding crop and looking down at the ‘innocent’ woman. The narrative of innocence and experience, the potential corruption, sexual experimentation and lesbian desire is obvious, but again, this is coded in specifically heterosexual male terms. Far from articulating a radical same-sex desire, the album cover conveys how patriarchal ideology constructs female-female sexual relations in fantasy terms. As Brill suggests: ‘a use of lesbian poses combines the simple effect of sexual titillation with the transgressive charge of homoeroticism, thus providing a particularly effective promotional tool in a subculture where transgression is cherished.’^{lxx}

If bisexuality in goth culture is constructed by a desiring heterosexual male gaze, how are women represented more generally in advertising, flyers and magazine copy? We might observe that ‘Sex is on the agenda, not only because it is an important subject, but because it sells.’^{lxxi} Many magazines feature alternative models and photographers who are seeking business within the scene. *Devolution* carries a ‘model spotlight’ and a ‘photographer spotlight’ section, whilst *Unscene* likewise features models seeking work, including full-page spreads. One model featured in *Unscene* (figure 12), Violet Magenta, sports a corset, cyber-dreads and hold up stockings: her photographs (reclining or sitting on a bed, wearing pasties, underwear, stockings but little else) are drawn from the pin-up, soft-core tradition.^{lxxii} Indeed, Violet explains she is also a burlesque performer and has wrestled ‘almost naked in custard.’ The problem with this is not sexual expression, but rather, as Levy has explained: ‘what we once regarded as a *kind* of sexual expression we now view *as* sexuality... “Raunchy” and

“liberated” are not synonyms. It is worth asking ourselves if this bawdy world of boobs and gams we have resurrected reflects how far we’ve come, or how far we have left to go.^{lxxiii} Certainly goth women articulate that a strong and visible sexuality is positive, and indeed, with the gradual incursion of fetish style in the scene, this became more overt.^{lxxiv} It should be noted that fetish has always been there, with Siouxsie Sioux’s flirtation with uniform, for instance, or bondage accessories left over from punk styles, but its visibility increased during the 1990s. Goth women often claim their style is ‘about power and control.’^{lxxv} Whilst there is obviously some subjective truth in this statement (it isn’t the purpose of this article to deny women their agency or claim their own sense of empowerment is false), more generally, it is difficult to see how an over-sexualised presentation of stereotypical femininity can fracture patriarchal valuations of women. The *femme fatale*, for instance (figure 13), frequently employed in goth culture as a model of empowered womanhood, is also ‘a familiar convention for representing threatening aspects of femininity within the safe bounds of patriarchal imagery.’^{lxxvi}

CONCLUSION

Goth provides a narrative of inclusion, but as we have seen above, there is rarely any political challenge or intrinsic radicalism about the everyday practice of the subculture. Notable exceptions to this general rule include other forms of political resistance, such as environmental and animal rights’ issues (Siouxsie Sioux is a notable campaigner, for instance). However, there is less visible political campaigning about gender and sexuality (as The Queer Alternative testifies). In terms of femininity in particular, the scene may provide a comparatively safe space in which women feel they can experiment with their appearance and their sexuality, but ultimately, these

gestures are contained within a broader discourse of heteronormativity and hyperfemininity. Bisexuality (along with BDSM and polyamory) has subcultural capital in goth, but at the same time, these practices are regularly constructed as male fantasy, rather than female sexual autonomy. Clothing and apparel espouses a complicated logic with regard to gender: men may play subversively with masculinity, but for women, a feminine style is the norm. Even the androgynous attire of male goths, the emphasis on beauty regimes and make-up as being 'womanly,' have recourse to essentialist discourses about what it means to be female in a subculture. In almost every instance, despite a 'dark' inflection, advertising copy, marketing, fashion spreads and photo shoots serve to emphasise a very mainstream vision of womanhood. Whilst these images may be read with parody or irony, it is nonetheless very much the case that 'the pervasive sexualisation of women in the public realm cuts away at their true empowerment.'^{lxxxvii} Twenty-first century goth, with its rhetoric of surface and style, conflates with mainstream understandings of gendered behaviour, and thus has much in common with postfeminist notions of heterosexuality, beauty and body management.

ⁱ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 69.

ⁱⁱ Paul Hodkinson, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), p. 32.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dunja Brill, *Goth Culture: Gender, Sexuality and Style* (Oxford, Berg, 2008), p. 65.

^{iv} Catherine Spooner, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 18.

^v Amy C. Wilkins, *Wannabes, Goths, and Christians: The Boundaries of Sex, Style, and Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 67.

^{vi} Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 255.

^{vii} John Fiske, 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom', in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 30.

^{viii} See Hodkinson (2002), p. 128.

^{ix} Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1979), pp. 93-4.

^x Hodkinson, (2002), p. 139.

^{xi} Such an eclectic range of related but distinct subcultures at one event suggests the possibility of reading some facets of contemporary goth as post-subculture (this is not without protest from many sections of the community, however). See Andy Bennett

- and Keith-Khan Harris, *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Cultur* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004), pp. 11-14, and David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).
- ^{xii} Diane Negra, *What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of the Self in Postfeminism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p. 5.
- ^{xiii} Negra (2009), p. 119.
- ^{xiv} Joshua Gunn in 'Dark Admissions: Gothic Subculture and the Ambivalence of Misogyny and Resistance' in Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby (eds), *Goth: Undead Subculture*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 52-3.
- ^{xv} Hodkinson, (2002), p. 56.
- ^{xvi} See 'The Blogging Goth', <http://theblogginggoth.com/2013/02/26/sisters-get-real-with-sponsorship/>, date accessed: 28 July 2015. See also *Devolution*, Issue 20 (2009), p. 42.
- ^{xvii} Julian Kynaston, Personal Interview, June 2013.
- ^{xviii} Julian Kynaston, Personal Interview, June 2013.
- ^{xix} Paul Hodkinson, 'Ageing in a spectacular "youth culture": continuity, change and community amongst older goths.' *The British Journal of Sociology* 62:2, pp. 262-82 (2011), p. 263.
- ^{xx} Hodkinson, (2011), p. 265.
- ^{xxi} Samantha Holland, *Alternative Femininities* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), pp. 99-100.
- ^{xxii} Mary Talbot *Language and Gender* (2nd ed. London: Polity Press. 2010), p. 150-1. See also Wolf, 1991, pp. 74-5.
- ^{xxiii} *Gothic Beauty* issue 37 (2012), p. 29.
- ^{xxiv} *Gothic Beauty*, issue 36, (2012), p. 10.
- ^{xxv} *Gothic Beauty*, issue 36, p. 11.
- ^{xxvi} *Gothic Beauty*, issue 36, p. 45-6.
- ^{xxvii} *Gothic Beauty*, issue 35 (2012), pp. 10-11.
- ^{xxviii} Talbot 2010, p. 153-4. See also Angela McRobbie (ed), *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1997), pp. 190-209.
- ^{xxix} See Gill (2007), pp. 255-62.
- ^{xxx} Brill (2008), p. 110.
- ^{xxxi} Gunn, in Goodlad and Bibby (2007), p. 58. See also Brill (2008), p. 68.
- ^{xxxii} Wolf (1991), p. 70.
- ^{xxxiii} Ross Haenfler, *Goths, Gamers, & Grrrls: Deviance and Youth Subcultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 90. See also Brill (2008), p. 37.
- ^{xxxiv} *The Worst Fanzine (TWF)*, issue 2 (2004), p. 20.
- ^{xxxv} *Devolution*, issue 27 (2010), p. 15.
- ^{xxxvi} Maria Elena Buzek, *Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality and Popular Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 8.
- ^{xxxvii} *Devolution*, issue 27, p. 15.
- ^{xxxviii} *Devolution*, issue 22, (2009), p. 15.
- ^{xxxix} Brill (2008), p. 40.
- ^{xl} See Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998). One publicly visible exception to the model of conventional goth femininity is Rosie Garland, author and lead singer in The March Violets. Her persona 'Rosie Lugosi', the Lesbian Vampire Queen, represents a clear example of a gender-queer image, whilst her use of tailored fashions, top hats and tailcoats, alongside corsets and lace blouses, emphasises the possibilities open to goth women.

See <http://greatweatherformedia.com/bacchus-and-the-march-violets-an-interview-with-rosie-garland/>. Date accessed: 21 December 2015.

^{xli} Julian Kynaston, Personal Interview, June 2013.

^{xlii} Paul, Personal Interview, June 2013.

^{xliii} Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 176. See also Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006) p. 130-1, and 'A Gothic Mind' by Catherine Spooner in *Alexander McQueen*, ed Claire Wilcox (London: V&A Publishing, 2015), p. 141.

^{xliv} Rebecca Mead, *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding* (New York: Penguin, 2007), p. 21.

^{xlvi} *Devolution*, issue 21 (2009), pp. 28-9.

^{xlvi} Gunn, in Goodlad and Bibby 2007, pp. 57-8.

^{xlvi} *Unscene*, issue 10, (Winter 2012), p. 13.

^{xlviii} Mead, p. 73.

^{xlix} Sarah Gamble, 'Postfeminism', in Sarah Gamble (ed), *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p. 44.

^l Trevor M. Holmes, 'Peri Gothous: On the Art of Gothicizing Gender' in Goodlad and Bibby (1997), p. 80.

^{li} Brill (2008), pp. 26-7.

^{lii} Brill 2008, p. 129.

^{liii} K. L. Baudelaire, Personal Interview, June 2013.

^{liv} K. L. Baudelaire, Personal Interview.

^{lv} Jessica Leigh Zaylia, 'Toward a Newer Theory of Sexuality: Terms, Titles and the Bitter Taste of Bisexuality,' *Journal of Bisexuality*, 9:2 (2009), pp. 109-123, pp. 112-3. See also Brill (2008), p. 139, and Wilkins (2008), p. 81.

^{lvi} K. L. Baudelaire, Personal Interview.

^{lvii} Wilkins (2008), p. 82.

^{lviii} K. L. Baudelaire, Personal Interview.

^{lix} Some of the pleasures and complexities surrounding the LGBTQ community's interaction with goth is explored here:

<http://www.theskinny.co.uk/sexuality/lgbt/queer-and-goth>. Date accessed: 21 December 2015.

^{lx} Wilkins (2008), p. 70.

^{lxi} <http://www.queeralternative.com/about-us>. Date accessed: 21 December 2015.

^{lxii} K. L. Baudelaire, Personal Interview.

^{lxiii} Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambiase, (eds), *Sex in Advertising: Perspectives on the Erotic Appeal* (London: Routledge. 2003), p. 244.

^{lxiv} Reichert and Lambiase (2003), p. 277.

^{lxv} John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008), pp. 40-1. See also Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2nd ed.

^{lxvi} Lorraine Gamman, 'Watching the Detectives: The Enigma of the Female Gaze', in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds), *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 12.

^{lxvii} See Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (London: Pocket Books, 2005).

^{lxviii} Brill (2008), p. 134.

^{lxix} Wolf, (1991), p. 140.

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4^{lxx} Brill (2008), p. 161.
5^{lxxi} Avis Lewallen, 'Lace: Pornography for Women?' in Gamman and Marshment
6 (1988), p. 101.
7^{lxxii} *Unscene*, issue 7, (2009), p. 23.
8^{lxxiii} Ariel Levy, p. 5.
9^{lxxiv} Hodkinson (2002), p. 51.
10^{lxxv} Brill, 2008, p. 65.
11^{lxxvi} Brill, 2008, p. 74.
12^{lxxvii} Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago, 2010), p.
13 210. For irony in magazines, see Bethan Benwell, 'Ironic Discourse: Evasive
14 Masculinity in British Men's Lifestyle Magazines,' *Men and Masculinities* 7:1 (2004),
15 pp. 3-21 and 'New Sexism?: Readers' Responses to the use of Irony in Men's
16 Magazines,' *Journalism Studies*, 8:4 (2007), pp. 539-49.
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MODEL WATCH

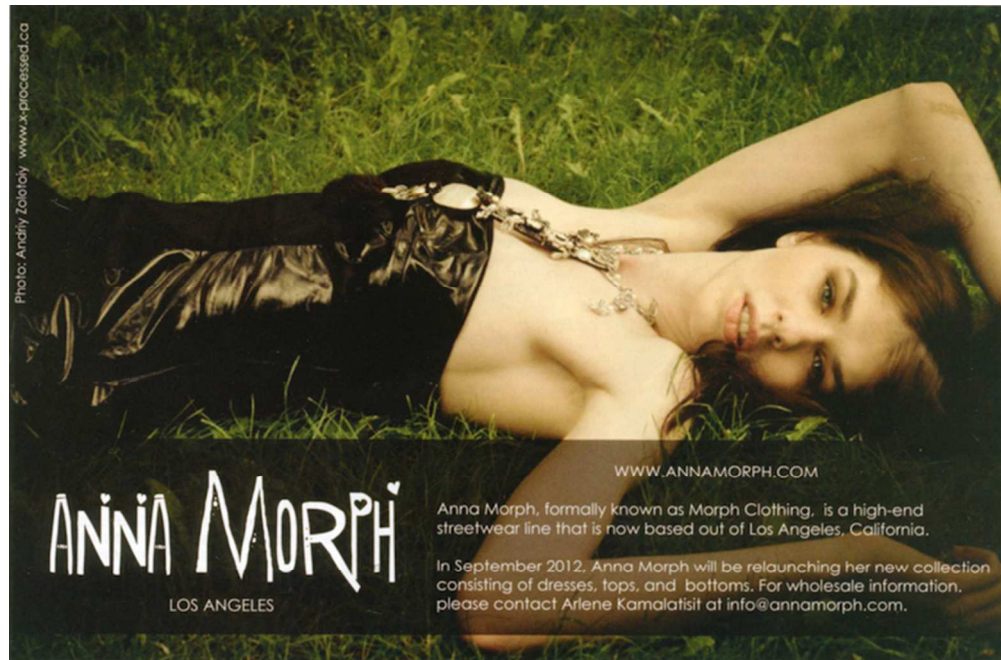


I am a professional agency represented model and actress based in the North West of England. I have a very androgynous look and am frighteningly versatile. I have a wicked sense of humour and a bizarre imagination. I love the quirky and the surreal and adore the alternative community. I can cover a wide range of styles including pin up, horror, alternative, fashion, gothic and fetish and I have so far had three years of modelling experience in which time I have been lucky enough to work with A Box Of Delights, Filth Wizard and have done some show and promo videos for After Dark Entertainments, How to Survive a Zombie Apocalypse and Zombie Aid 2. I have previously appeared in Bizarre Magazine but would love to get more work published in other mediums. If you would like to work with me then please don't hesitate to get in touch.
Email: collettevontora@gmail.com
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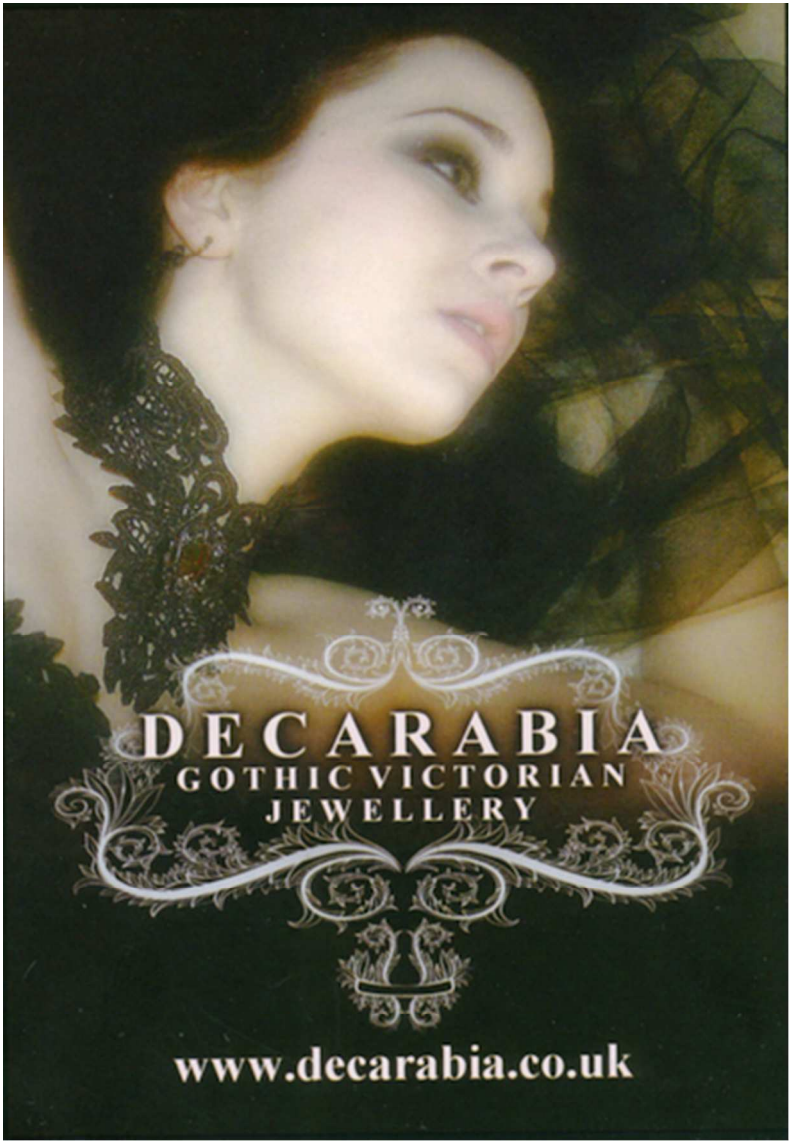
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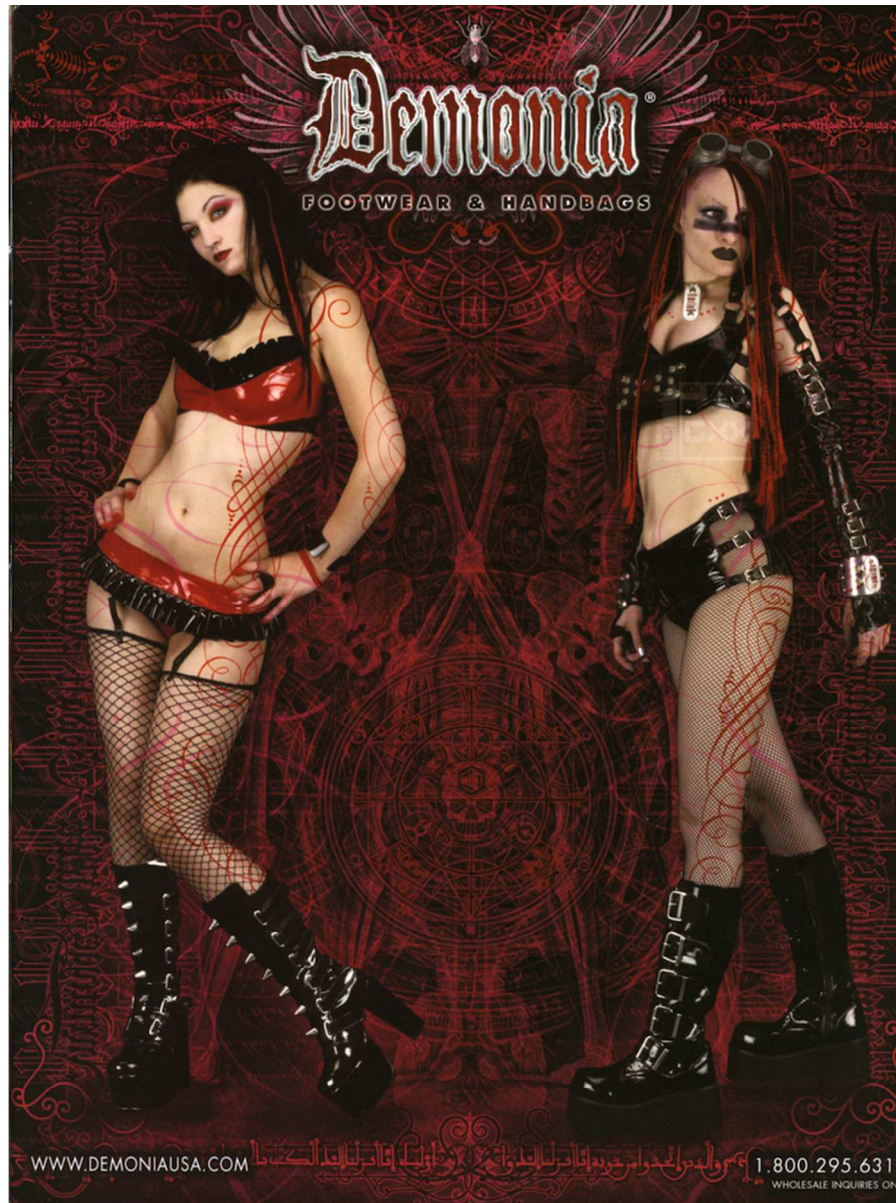


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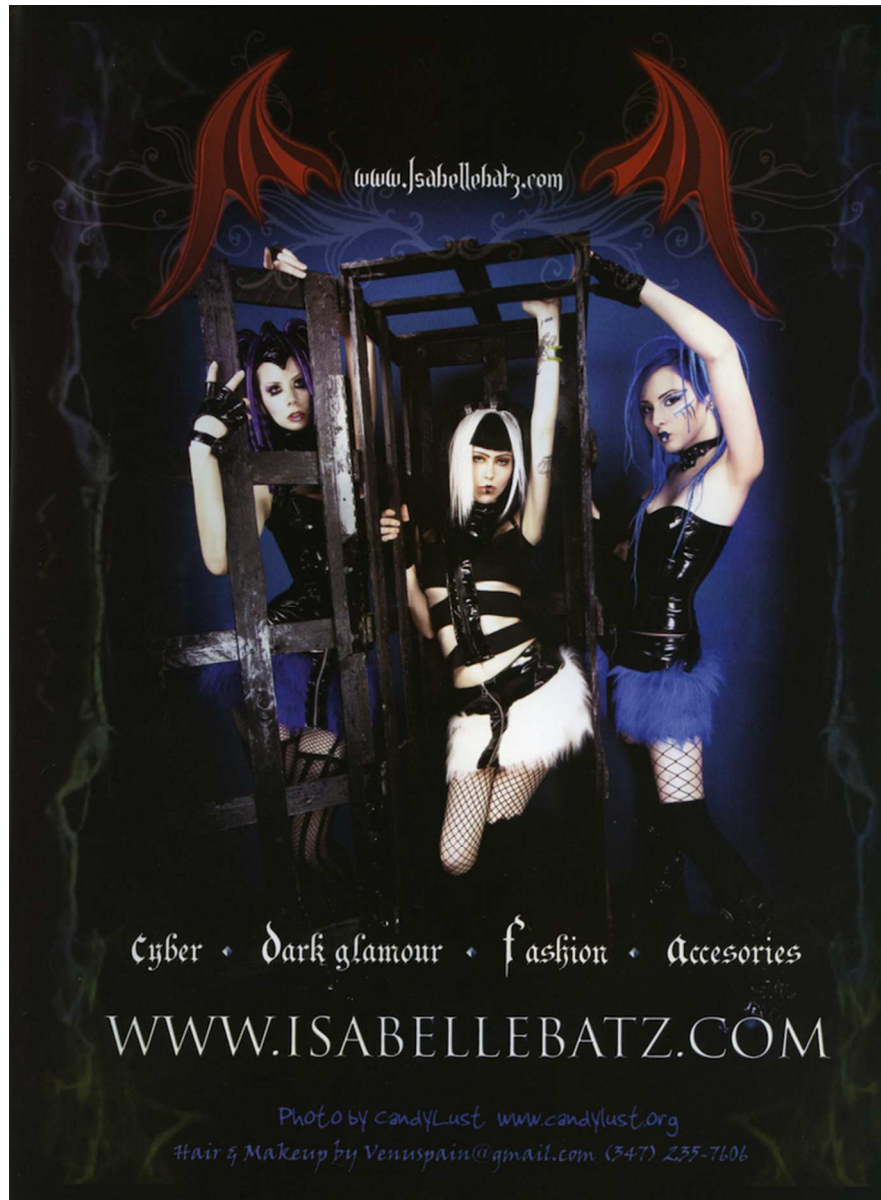
FIND US ON FACEBOOK 

202x274mm (100 x 100 DPI)

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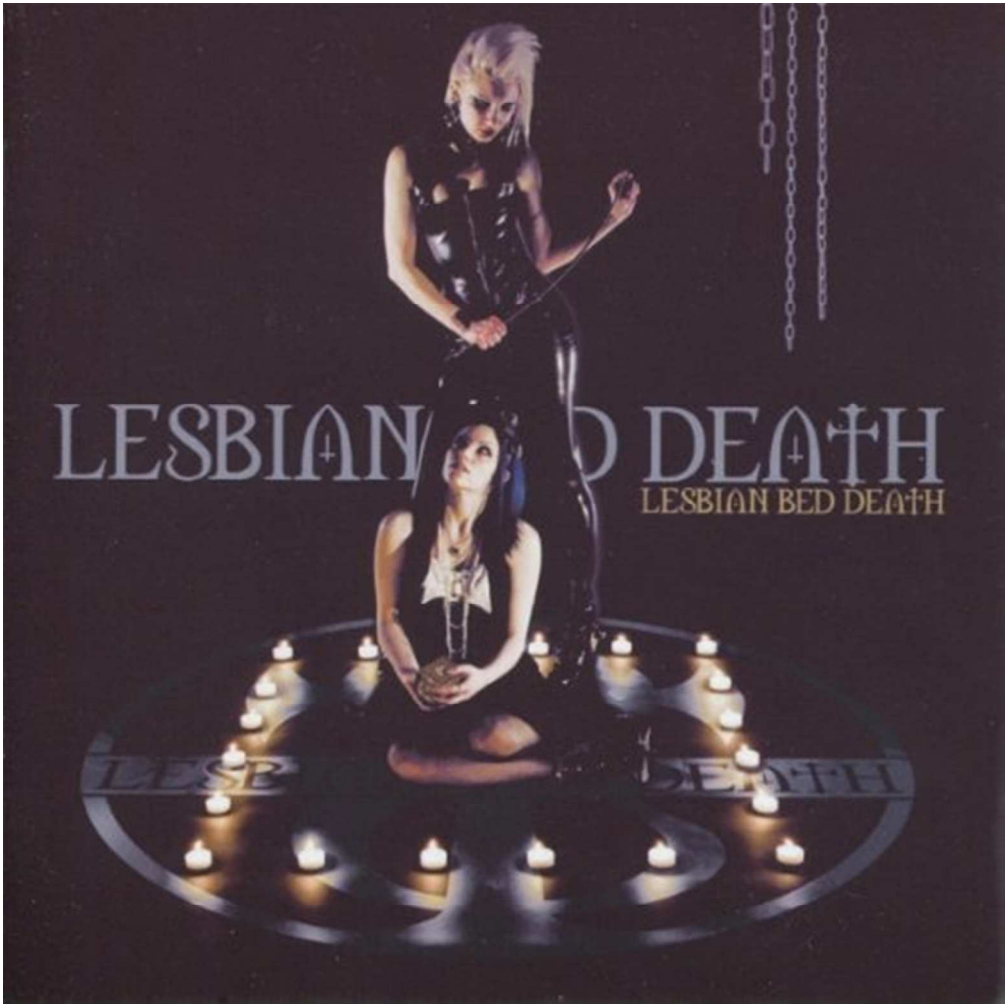


97x263mm (100 x 100 DPI)



200x273mm (100 x 100 DPI)

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176x176mm (72 x 72 DPI)





204x154mm (100 x 100 DPI)



210x154mm (100 x 100 DPI)